Metarevolution for Middle School

By Evan Tabak Atlas

Summary by Gemini

Introduction: What's This Book About?

This book is like a love story, but about two big ideas: **Value** (what's important and good) and **Action** (what we do). It explains that nowadays, the world's problems (like issues with governments, money, schools, new technology, and the planet) aren't just separate problems anymore. They're all tangled together in a giant mess, like a huge knot. This book calls this big knot a **"metacrisis"**.

Because everything's connected, just fixing one problem at a time isn't enough. That's like trying to untie just one string in the knot. We need a new way, called a **"metarevolution"**. This means looking at the *whole* knot of problems together and trying to fix the *reasons* why the knot formed in the first place. It's like studying the whole forest instead of just one tree. This book gives us ideas and tools to think this new way, aiming to change how we make changes in the world, based on what’s truly valuable.

The book is split into two big parts:

1. **Understanding the Big Knot (Metacrisis):** We look closely at the connected problems we face.
2. **Untangling the Knot (Metarevolution):** We explore new ways to act and solve these problems.

Part 1: The Big Knot of Problems (Metacrisis)

- **1.1 Meaning: What Really Matters?**
  - Sometimes people feel lost, like things don't make sense or have a real purpose. This is a big problem because if we don't know what's truly important (The Good), it's hard to know what actions to take.
  - This book talks about two main ways of looking at the world:
    - **Optimism:** Believing that good things like value and meaning are real and we can find them. It means we should act in ways that bring more goodness into the world.
    - **Nihilism:** Thinking that nothing really matters, and ideas like "good" are just made up or about power. This can make the world feel empty, like a flat picture with no depth.
  - A popular story type today, the **Zombie Apocalypse**, is like a picture of this feeling of lost meaning. Zombies can stand for emptiness, acting without thinking, or societies that feel "dead" inside. Importantly, the danger isn't just "out there"; it's the potential inside us to lose our way and become like zombies. Fixing this means looking inside ourselves and choosing optimism and connection over emptiness.
- **1.1.1 Metamodernism: Our Current Time**
  - The ways people used to think about the world (ideas called Modernism and Postmodernism) aren't quite working anymore. Modernism sometimes focused too much on rules and big ideas, forgetting feelings. Postmodernism questioned everything so much it sometimes felt like nothing was real or true.
  - We're moving into a new time called **Metamodernism**. It's like trying to be hopeful *and* realistic at the same time. It’s about trying to rebuild a sense of meaning and value, even when things feel broken or confusing. It's like trying to fix a boat while you're still sailing in it! It means finding a balance between opposites, like seriousness and playfulness, or doubt and belief. It also means bringing back the importance of stories, imagination, and symbols to

understand the world more deeply.

- **1.1.2 The Good: The Most Important Thing**
  - The biggest reason we might feel lost is because we've forgotten about **"The Good"**. This isn't just about "good things" but about Goodness itself – the main source of all value, like the sun is the source of light.
  - Believing in The Good means understanding that value is real and we should aim for it. When we lose sight of The Good, we might start thinking only about power or our own selfish desires.
  - True freedom isn't just doing whatever you want; it's learning to want what is truly Good. It's like an artist who becomes truly free by carefully learning and obeying the rules of their art. Paying attention to The Good helps us make better choices and become better people. We need to find ways to aim for The Good together, without forcing everyone to be the same.
- **1.2 Complexity: It's All Connected**
  - The world isn't just a bunch of separate things; it's a **complex system** where everything affects everything else, like a web or an ecosystem. Trying to understand just one part without seeing the whole picture doesn't work well.
  - Thinking in terms of complex systems helps us see patterns and connections we might otherwise miss.
- **1.2.1 Units: The Building Blocks**
  - To understand complex things, we look at their basic building blocks.
  - **States:** These are the different possibilities a system can be in (like a light switch being on or off). More states mean more variety or complexity. To handle complex problems, our ability to act (our "action-centers") needs to have at least as much variety as the problem itself (this is called the **Law of Requisite Variety**).
  - **Matter:** Things like atoms and tiny particles are the building blocks of physical stuff. But just looking at matter isn't enough; we also need to think about value and meaning.

- **Information (Bits):** Information helps reduce uncertainty. It's measured in "bits" (binary digits). Complex systems need to process information effectively. Too much "noise" (bad or useless information) can block the "signal" (good information).
- **Energy (Calories):** Everything that happens involves energy changing form. "Power" is how fast energy flows. Using energy wisely and for good purposes is really important.
- **Symbols:** These are like keys that unlock meaning. They connect things, help us understand complex ideas, and express values. Our whole world is full of symbols.
- **Holons & Monads:** A "holon" is something that's both a whole thing by itself *and* a part of a bigger whole (like a cell is a whole cell, but also part of your body). Reality is a "holarchy" – wholes within wholes. "Monads" are an even deeper idea: tiny, basic units that have both physical and "spirit-like" qualities – they are the smallest bits of value-and-action together. Thinking this way helps us see that everything, even tiny things, has some form of awareness and value.

- **1.2.2 Features & Behaviors: How Complex Things Act**
  - Complex systems have special ways of behaving:
  - **Feedback Loops:** Actions create results that circle back and influence future actions. "Positive feedback" makes things grow bigger or faster (good or bad). "Negative feedback" helps keep things stable. Understanding these loops helps us see how problems can grow or how we can create balance.
  - **Synergy & Emergence:** Sometimes when parts come together, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts (**synergy**). Sometimes, completely new properties appear that the parts didn't have (**emergence**), like life emerging from chemicals or thoughts emerging from brain cells.
  - **Nonlinearity:** Small changes can sometimes cause huge effects, or the effect isn't proportional to the cause. This is like the "butterfly effect".

Understanding this helps find "leverage points" where a small, smart action can make a big difference.

- **Fractality:** Patterns that repeat themselves at different sizes, like the branches of a tree or a coastline. This self-similarity shows how complex things can be built from simple rules. It also tells us that extreme events ("fat tails" on a graph) might be more common in complex systems (like big market crashes) than we expect based on simple "bell curve" thinking.
- **Fragility & Antifragility:** Things can be **fragile** (break easily under stress), **robust** (resist stress), or **antifragile** (get stronger from stress). We want to build systems (like our societies or technologies) that are antifragile, learning and improving from challenges instead of breaking. This involves things like letting small failures happen to learn from them ("chaos engineering") and having "weak links" so problems don't spread everywhere.

- **1.2.3 The Evolution of Complexity: How Things Get Complex**
  - Things in the universe tend to get more complex and organized over time, not just more random. This happens through **self-organization**.
  - Living things especially fight against disorder (entropy) by taking in energy and information ("negative entropy").
  - The **Free-Energy Principle (FEP)** suggests living things try to minimize "surprise" – the difference between what they expect to sense and what they actually sense. They do this by changing their internal predictions (learning) or by acting on the world to make reality match predictions.
  - This drive leads to **Metasystem Transitions** – big leaps where systems organize into new, higher levels of control and complexity, like single cells forming bodies, or individuals forming societies. Evolution moves towards more complexity and awareness.
- **1.3 Games: How We Interact**
  - Many interactions can be understood as **games** with players, rules, choices, values, and meaning. Game theory helps us understand cooperation and

competition.
    - Life isn't just about work; **play** (exploring possibilities within games) is incredibly important for creativity and finding meaning.
- **1.3.1 Incentives & Traps: Why We Get Stuck**
    - Games have built-in **incentives** that encourage certain choices. Sometimes, these lead to **traps** where everyone acting in their own short-term best interest leads to a bad outcome for the whole group. This is the "race to the bottom", seen in things like arms races or pollution (the "Tragedy of the Commons"). It often involves undervaluing the future. Thinking about "what if" scenarios (**counterfactuals**) is key to understanding and avoiding traps.
- **1.3.2 Tits & Tats, Rabbits & Stags: Different Kinds of Games**
    - The **Prisoner's Dilemma** shows a classic trap where mistrust leads both players to choose an option ("defect") that's worse for both than if they had cooperated.
    - The **Stag Hunt** game shows a situation where cooperation gives the biggest reward (hunting a big stag together), but requires trust. Defecting (catching a small rabbit alone) is safer but less rewarding. This highlights the importance of assurance and trust.
    - In repeated games, strategies like **Tit-for-Tat** (cooperate first, then copy your opponent's last move) often work well. It encourages cooperation but punishes defection.
- **1.3.3 Evolutionary Stability: Which Strategies Last?**
    - Strategies in games compete like animals in nature. An **Evolutionarily Stable Strategy (ESS)** is one that, once common, can't easily be beaten by a new strategy.
    - "Always Defect" can be stable, but leads to bad outcomes. Tit-for-Tat can also be stable and leads to better outcomes, especially if cooperators can find each other (clustering).
    - To encourage cooperation, we need: social structures that support trust and

reputation; ways for cooperators to connect; valuing the future; and teaching people about cooperation. We need to design games (**mechanism design**) that make cooperation the smart *and* stable choice.

Part 2: Untangling the Knot (Metarevolution)

- Metarevolution is the necessary response to the metacrisis. It's about transforming the process of transformation itself, aiming for greater complexity, consciousness, and coherence in our actions and systems. It mirrors the metacrisis: just as crises interact, revolutionary actions must interact coherently within a larger system. The focus shifts from reacting to crises to proactively evolving the "action-centers" (individuals, groups, societies, the planet) that engage with them. We'll use the resolution of the meaning crisis as an example that demonstrates broader metarevolutionary principles.
- **2.1 Centers of Action: Acting Smarter Together**
    - To solve the big, complex metacrisis, we need our ways of acting to become more complex and aware. This involves thinking about how we act not just as individuals ("I") but as part of larger groups and even a planetary system ("We").
- **2.1.1 A Hyperorganism's Manifesto: The Big Picture of Us**
    - Think of all life and systems on Earth as being part of one giant, interconnected living thing – a **"Hyperorganism"**. This includes people, societies, nature, technology – everything working together (or sometimes against each other).
    - Understanding ourselves as part of this bigger system helps us see our connections and responsibilities. We need to build this hyperorganism in a way that's healthy, valuing both the whole *and* the individuals within it, based on cooperation ("power-with") not domination ("power-over").
- **2.1.2 Cognition: Thinking Together**
    - Just like one person thinks, the hyperorganism needs to "think" too. This means creating **Collective Intelligence** – ways for many minds (people and maybe smart computers) to share information and make smarter decisions together than any single mind could. This could be like a "Global Brain". This needs to empower individuals, not turn them into mindless parts of a machine.

- **2.1.3 Sensation: Feeling the World Together**
  - The hyperorganism also needs "senses" to understand what's happening across the planet. This could involve creating a **"sense web"** or **Internet of Senses (IoS)**.
  - This involves integrating data from diverse sources—human experiences, ecological monitors, technological sensors (IoT), even potentially animal senses via technology—into a coherent whole.
  - This allows the hyperorganism, and individuals within it, to gain a more holistic, empathetic understanding of the world ("what it feels like to be the planet"). This enhanced awareness is crucial for informed action, feedback loops (FEP), and fostering a deeper connection between humanity and the biosphere.
- **2.1.4 Trust, Organization & Ownership: Building on Solid Ground**
  - For a hyperorganism to work well and fairly, we need new ways to build **trust** and organize ourselves without everything being controlled by a few powerful companies or governments.
  - Technology like **blockchain** (the idea behind Bitcoin) offers ways to create trust and agreement in a decentralized way (without a middleman). It solves coordination problems like "double-spending" and the "Byzantine Generals Problem".
  - Key Applications:
    - Decentralized Infrastructure: Enables collective ownership and control of essential digital infrastructure (networks, computing power, AI platforms), preventing capture.
    - Smart Contracts: Automate agreements and processes transparently and reliably.
    - DAOs (Decentralized Autonomous Organizations): Allow for self-governing communities and organizations operating on blockchain, facilitating polycentric governance models.

        - NFTs (Non-Fungible Tokens): Provide secure, verifiable ownership for digital and potentially physical assets, including identities and intellectual property, disintermediating traditional authorities.
    - These technologies provide the tools to build a hyperorganism that is self-organized, resilient to capture, and empowers its individual components, fostering a holarchic structure based on "power-with".
- **2.1.5 Risk & Reward: Getting Stronger from Challenges**
    - The hyperorganism must be robust and ideally **Antifragile** – capable of learning and strengthening from shocks, errors, and volatility.
    - Accurate Risk Perception: Move beyond simplistic risk models (like Gaussian distributions) that underestimate extreme events ("fat tails"). Employ **fractal models** (like MSM) to better understand and navigate the inherent turbulence of complex systems.
    - Designing for Antifragility:
        - Embrace Volatility: Recognize that suppressing all fluctuations leads to fragility; controlled exposure to stress builds strength ("stability through volatility").
        - Chaos Engineering: Deliberately introduce failures into systems (like Netflix's Simian Army) to test resilience and drive adaptation ("fail fast").
        - Modularity & Weak Links: Design systems as interconnected modules with "weak links" that allow failing parts to decouple, preventing catastrophic cascades. Balance integration with autonomy.
- **2.1.6 Coordination: Working Together Smoothly**
    - How can all the parts of the hyperorganism work together without a single boss telling everyone what to do? Through **Stigmergy**. This is when actions leave traces (like ants leaving scent trails) that guide the next actions of others. Wikipedia editing is a human example. We can use this idea to coordinate complex tasks by breaking them into "challenges" that people or groups can pick up and work on, leaving their results for the next step.

- **2.1.7 Prediction: Looking Ahead Together**
    - The hyperorganism's ability to anticipate the future is crucial for adaptation and survival (FEP). This requires scaling up predictive capabilities.
    - **Prediction Markets**, where people bet on future events, can be surprisingly accurate at showing the collective guess about what's likely to happen. Combining these markets with collective intelligence tools can help us make better decisions as a society.
- **2.1.8 Action: Playing the Big Game**
    - All these pieces – intelligence, senses, trust, coordination, prediction – come together to help the hyperorganism *act* more effectively in the world. This involves playing the "Hypergame" – not just choosing actions within the current situation, but actively choosing and designing *better games* to play (better economic systems, better political systems, etc.). We need to redesign the rules to encourage cooperation and escape the "race to the bottom" traps.
- **2.1.9 Freedom: What It Really Means**
    - True **freedom** isn't merely the absence of constraint or the maximization of options, but the perfected capacity to act in **Obedience to The Good**.
    - Freedom through Alignment: It arises from clear perception of and loving attention to objective Value, leading to choices that spontaneously align with the Good. This feels like decisiveness and deep purpose, not limitation.
    - Freedom and the Hyperorganism: The evolution towards a more complex, conscious, and integrated hyperorganism, when ethically guided, enhances this true freedom. By increasing our collective capacity to sense, understand, predict, and act in accordance with the Good, it empowers individuals to participate more fully in the actualization of value.
- **2.2 Transformation: Changing Ourselves and the World**
    - Solving the meaning crisis, and the metacrisis overall, requires **transformation** – deep changes in how we see ourselves and the world. This

isn't always slow; sometimes it happens in big leaps or sudden insights (**transformative experiences**).
    - Transformation has two sides: **Development** (growing "up," reaching higher levels of understanding and spirit) and **Depth** (going "down," exploring our inner world, soul, and shadows). We need both.
    - Tools & Practices: A wide range of methods facilitate transformation, including **dreams**, **active imagination**, **immersive technologies (VR)**, ancient practices like **shamanism** (using altered states or "ecstasy" for insight and healing), communal rituals (like **Eleusis**), and **alchemy** (seeing transformation in everything, aiming for inner "gold").
- **2.2.1 Immortality: The Ultimate Goal?**
    - This book rethinks **immortality**. It's not just about living forever physically (though longer, healthier lives are good!). True immortality is about living a life of *endless growth in meaning, depth, love, and connection*. It's the ongoing quest for perfection and becoming fully aligned with The Good. It's the opposite of a stagnant, empty, "undead" existence.
- **2.2.2 The Challenge of Meaning: Making Sense Together**
    - Reversing the meaning crisis requires a collective engagement with the creation and understanding of symbols, facilitated by a **Universal Language (Characteristica Universalis)**.
    - The Language: A system capable of representing the transformations of value-in-action across all domains (physical, spiritual, social). It needs:
        - Basic Elements: Foundational symbols from logic, mathematics, potentially Leibniz's "alphabet of thought", and **Energese** (Odum's language for energy systems), crucially extended to explicitly include symbols for Value, spiritual energy (Eros/Love), analogy (:, ::), and comparison (<, >).
        - Complex Synthesis: Methods for combining basic symbols into intricate metasymbols (like mandalas, quaternities, alchemical glyphs) that capture complex relationships and transformations.

    - The Symbol Game (Collective Development): A proposed large-scale, stigmergic game to collaboratively build and refine this universal language. Inspired by traditions of serious play (Hesse, Fuller), it would likely involve:
        - Decentralized Platforms (Blockchain/NFTs): Allowing anyone to create, share, and establish ownership of symbolic representations (diagrams, concepts, ideas) as unique digital tokens.
        - Market Mechanisms (Prediction Markets): Collectively assessing the truthfulness, usefulness, efficiency, or value of these symbolic tokens and the ideas they represent.
        - Collaborative Tools (DAOs): Enabling groups to work together on specific symbolic projects or explorations.
    - Outcome: This game aligns individual incentives with the collective goal of developing a powerful shared language for understanding and guiding reality towards the Good, making meaning-making a participatory, evolutionary process.
- **2.2.3 The Philosopher Goes Down: Bringing Wisdom into the World**
    - The insights gained from transformation and understanding the symbolic language can't just stay as abstract ideas. They need to be brought "down" and applied to the real world. This means letting these deeper understandings shape our **architecture**, our **economic systems** (maybe like ideas from Henry George about sharing the value of land), our **institutions**, and how we relate to **nature**. It's about making our outer world reflect our best inner understanding.
- **2.3 Coda: Love**
    - In the end, **Love (Eros)** is the force that connects Value and Action. It's the energy behind moral action and the drive towards the Good. It's what allows us to unite as two-in-one, preserving individuality while achieving connection. The whole metarevolutionary project—building the hyperorganism, mastering transformation, developing the universal language—is ultimately an act of

perfecting our capacity to participate in Love. It's about creating systems and a culture where actions are guided by a loving orientation towards the Good, fostering flourishing at all levels of reality.